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ABSTRACT

The aims of the present study were (1) to develop an instrument that would assess the child care needs of a relatively large group of university employees, and (2) to determine whether sufficient need existed to impel the employer to establish such a worker benefit. The project was conceived when a single group of employees (clerical personnel) approached the university administration regarding the issue of child care. In response, the university supported the idea of conducting an investigation of employees' child care needs. Representatives from the administration and various employee groups discussed the employees' child care needs and constructed a questionnaire, which was pilot-tested on a group of nonuniversity employees. Then the questionnaire was distributed through university employee groups; a 43 percent return was obtained. Analyses of data indicated that 14 percent of the respondents had children under 13 years of age and that half of these respondents were using some type of paid child care. Other results indicated that employees had relatively little difficulty in arranging child care at moderate expense. It was concluded that adequate services presently existed in the community. However, the university became aware of employees' needs and the potential benefits to the employer of onsite child care services. Thus, an agreement was negotiated with the city school system to reserve slots in child care centers located near the university. (CB)

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Employer Sponsored Child Care Services: An Assessment of University Employee Needs

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Running head: EMPLOYER SPONSORED CHILD CARE

Abstract

As the number of women in the labor force continues to increase there will be growing concern for the establishment of employer sponsored child care arrangements. The aim of the present study was to develop an instrument which would successfully assess the child care needs of a relatively large employee group (N = 1,396), and to determine whether sufficient need existed to impel an employer to establish such a benefit for workers. Though results of the study indicated adequate services presently were available in the community, the employer became acutely aware of employees' concerns and took some action to assist them in meeting their child care needs.

Employer Sponsored Child Care Services:

An Assessment of University Employer Needs

In recent years the number of women in the labor force who have young children has increased dramatically. One consequence of this has been renewed interest in the establishment of employer sponsored child care. Hicks and Powell (1983) report that in 1981, 47 percent of women with children under age six were in the labor market and this is anticipated to exceed 50 percent by the year 1990. In terms of real numbers, there are eight million preschool children of working mothers. This number is estimated to reach 10.5 million by 1990 (Johnston, 1983). Obviously the current need for child care services is great and will continue in the foreseeable future.

The concept of employer sponsored child care is not new. Historically such services have arisen when women were needed in the work force. During World War I many women were employed to replace men who joined the armed services. Because the number of female employees increased by one million (Greenblatt, 1977) industries responded by establishing child care centers. Again, during World War II women were needed in the labor force. The passage of the Lanham Act of 1940 provided for the operation of child care centers designed for the children of working women (Osborn, 1980). For the most part these efforts were highly successful though short-lived (Steinfels, 1973).

During the 1950's and 1960's, with the return of male workers to the labor force and an emphasis on child rearing, many women left industry to fulfill what had been their traditional positions in the home. The inflationary economic conditions of the 1970's, accompanied by a rapid

increase in single parent households, and a rejection of traditional home-making roles have supported the return of many women to the labor force. This has led to the re-establishment of employer operated child care programs. Currently such programs are typically sponsored by hospitals, foundations, private industries, labor unions, and educational institutions (Hicks & Powell, 1983). The trend toward employer sponsored programs for the care of employees' children appears to be growing as employee groups (unions) bargain for a guarantee of such services in their contract arbitrations. Thus it behooves workers, professionals, and employers to be aware of this issue and the various means for assessing child care service needs.

The present study was designed to investigate the existing child care needs of all employees at a relatively large (16,000 students) Midwestern university located in a semi-rural area. The aim was to determine if employees needs were sufficient to justify the establishment of an on-site child care facility. It is intended that this report will be of assistance to individuals involved in assessing actual child care needs and conveying results to appropriate sources.

Methodology

The goal of the study was to ascertain if existing community child care services were adequately meeting employees' needs, or if the employer (the university) should take action to alieviate difficulties in arranging appropriate child care. The impetus for this project occurred when a single group of employees (clerical personnel) approached the administration regarding the issue of child care. The administration, acutely aware of

these concerns supported the idea of conducting an investigation of employees' child care needs. The university administration facilitated the actual study by distributing and collecting questionnaires, and providing clerical assistance for the coding and analysis of data.

Instrument Design. Representatives from the administration and each of the employee groups (clerical, faculty, food service, maintenance, police, and support personnel) discussed the employees' child care needs. After presenting various concerns, a questionnaire was constructed to gather the desired information. This instrument, entitled "Child Care Questionnaire" (available upon request), was developed with the assistance of professionals in the field of child development, and was pilot tested for relevance and readability on a group of parents who were not university employees. The questionnaire was designed to allow for direct coding and use in computerized analysis. The type of information requested is shown in Table 1. All participants were assured of complete confidentiality and anonymity of their responses.

Subjects. The target population of the study was all university personnel regardless of whether their employment status was full, three-quarters, or half-time. Questionnaires were distributed to 1,396 employees and returned by 597, yielding a response rate of approximately 43 percent. Though this was not as high as had been desired it was deemed acceptable as the distribution across employee groups was fairly equitable.

Distribution and Collection of Questionnaires. Instruments were distributed directly through employee groups. This insured each employee received a questionnaire, was highly efficient and expedited the process.

A cover letter explaining the purpose of the study and stating the employee groups' support of the project accompanied the questionnaire. The instrument was designed with a return address printed on the back page so after completion the employee needed only to fold the instrument in half and deposit it in the mail. It is believed these various features favorably contributed to the achieved response rate.

Results

Because of the descriptive nature of the investigation data were examined in terms of frequencies and percentages. Both statistics were utilized to portray child care needs as accurately as possible. Analyses of the data indicated that at the time of the study approximately 14 percent (N=223) of the respondents had a total of 334 children under 13 years of age. There are two main reasons for this relatively small number of younger children: 1) poor economic conditions and declining enrollments have led to a reduction in positions at the university, and (2) many employees have resided in the community for a long time and have older children. Of the respondents with children who fell in the category of possibly needing adult supervision, 50% were using some type of paid child care arrangement. By far the largest number of employees (58 or 17.4%) indicated family day care as the type of service being used, followed by the employment of a sitter in the home (38 or 11.4%) (see Table 2).

Employees were asked to indicate the number of hours their children spent per week with a caregiver other than a parent. The greatest number of respondents (41 or 12.3%) indicated their children spent less than ten hours in outside care. The second largest group (34 or 10.2%) stated

their children were with a paid caregiver between 41 and 50 hours per week (see Table 2). Two major factors considered in this needs assessment were the amount of money spent per week and employees' degree of difficulty in arranging child care. Results indicate a relatively low-to-moderate amount of money was being paid by employees (see Table 2). The amount of money spent on child care ranged from less than $10 per week to more than $60, with the average cost being approximately $26. With regard to the degree of difficulty employees had in finding suitable child care, the greatest number (39 or 17.5%) indicated it was difficult for them to make such arrangements (see Table 2). However, an additional 17% indicated they experienced little difficulty in arranging such services. Overall, considerable variability was expressed with regard to the number of hours, amount of money spent, and degree of difficulty in obtaining child care.

Arrangements made by employees for the care of a child too ill to attend a child care program were examined, as this was thought to be a distinct advantage of on-site services. By far the largest number of employees (76 or 34.1%) either stayed home or shared child care responsibilities with their spouses (see Table 2). In response to a final item asking employees what types of child care services would be utilized if they were available on site, employees indicated these were infant care (30 or 13.5%), after school care (29 or 13.0%), and toddler care (26 or 11.7%).

Discussion

On the basis of the data gathered it was concluded that there was a considerable number of employees using child care services of some type

who were likely to continue doing so in the near future. Most of these parents had been able to make child care arrangements within the immediate community without great difficulty and were paying a relatively modest fee. The response rate of 43 percent led to the belief that only those individuals who felt strongly about the issue responded, perhaps providing an inflated picture of child care needs and difficulties. It appeared there was not a great need for child care services to be established and maintained by the university as a benefit to employees. It is likely that such a service would be appreciated and well used by employee groups but was not of high demand as alternatives were available through other sources in the community.

When university administrators were presented these findings they too concluded that at the present time child care services were not needed by a large enough number of employees to justify the expense and effort involved in establishing such a service at their place of work. Realizing, however, the employees' needs and the potential benefits to the employer associated with on-site child care services (i.e., positive attitudes of employees toward employer and work; elimination of employee stress; increased productivity; decline in absenteeism; decreased turnover; good community relations; and increased ease of recruitment of new employees) (Verzaro-Lawrence, LeBlanc, & Hennon, 1982), the university decided to take action which could be of assistance to employees. After exploring various alternatives, the university negotiated an agreement with the City school system to insure that 60 to 70 slots in their child care center would be reserved for children of university employees. These centers are located

approximately seven tenths of a mile, and one and one-half miles from the employees' place of work, and provide numerous benefits to those who choose to enroll their children in them. The benefits are identical to those offered by Perry (1978) as being associated with on-site centers: quality child care close to the parents' work area, additional time together communting, ease of reaching child in emergencies, and operating hours corresponding to work hours.

Conclusion

The entire process of assessing employees' needs for child care services taught all involved a great deal. First, employees and employers can work together in a harmonious manner and need not perceive the other as "the enemy". Second, it is possible to fairly accurately assess employees' child care needs if appropriate time and effort is taken prior to actual data collection. Third, it is extremely important that employee groups and advocates are knowledgeable of the numerous benefits to employers and employees to having on-site child care services in order to present a convincing argument to employers. Finally, even if data do not adequately support employees' assumptions about child care needs, interaction with employers regarding the issue may be of immense benefit. In sum, a professional, well organized attempt to assess child care needs can always be of value. The need for high quality child care services is real and employers must be made aware of this. Employee groups and advocates should be encouraged to petition for on-site child care services wherever they feel they are needed.

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TABLE 1

Sample Issues Examined through Child Care Questionnaire

Age and number of children in one's family under age 12 years

Who has primary responsibility for child care

Type of child care services utilized

Hours per week of child care services used

Cost per week per child for child care services

Amount willing to pay for child care services

Percentage of total family income spent annually on child care services

Degree of difficulty arranging child care services

Distance traveled to caretaker facility

Child care arrangements made when child is ill

What types of child care services would be used if available at work site

TABLE 2

Summary of Data Acquired from Child Care Questionnaire

Item	Frequency	Percentage
Types of services used by all children (N=334)		
Nursery School	14	4.2
Day Care	23	6.9
Family Day Care	58	17.4
Sitter in Home	38	11.4
After School Care	18	5.4
Other	20	6.0
Total	171	51.3
Hours spent per week with a caregiver other than parent (N=334)		
0 - 10	41	12.3
11 - 20	33	9.9
21 - 30	26	7.8
31 - 40	26	7.8
41 - 50	34	10.2
51 and over	1	.3
Total	161	48.3
Amount paid per week per child for child care (N=334)		
$ 0 - 10	26	7.8
$11 - 20	28	8.4
$21 - 30	37	11.1
$31 - 40	25	7.5
$41 - 50	14	4.2
$51 - 60	11	3.3
$61 and over	3	.9
Total	144	43.2
Degree of difficulty in arranging child care (N=223)		
Easy	20	8.9
Not Very Difficult	38	17.0
Difficult	39	17.5
Extremely Difficult	10	4.5
No Opinion	2	.9
Total	109	48.8

TABLE 2 (continued)

Summary of Data Acquired from Child Care Questionnaires

Item	Frequency	Percentage
Arrangements made by parents when child is ill (N=223)		
Employee Stays Home	39	17.5
Spouse Stays Home	6	2.7
Employment of Sitter	6	2.7
Employee and Spouse Share Responsibility	37	16.6
Relatives/Friends	9	4.0
Other	13	5.9
Total	110	49.4
Child care services utilized by employees if available on-site (N=223)		
Infant Care (0 - 18 months)	30	13.5
Toddler Care (18 - 36 months)	26	11.7
Preschool (3 - 5 years)	39	17.5
After School (6 - 12 years)	29	13.0
Total	124	55.7